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ABSTRACT

Literature can be used effectively in working with remedial readers to develop their vocabulary and comprehension skills. Three areas need to be addressed when working with remedial readers: (1) the concept of "reading" is usually underdeveloped with remedial students; (2) many remedial students have lowered self-concepts; and (3) many remedial readers do not have a wide range of reading interests. When working with remedial readers, negative attitudes toward reading may be turned around simply by adjusting the curriculum which is presented to them and taking into account the psychological needs of the students. To do this, teachers can take the first step by administering an interest inventory to remedial students. After the administration of the interest inventory, the teacher should then categorize the students' responses and compile a list of books that could be used in the classroom to accommodate students' interests. To develop vocabulary skills, students can illustrate the meanings of new words, or play matching games on classroom bulletin boards. For comprehension, students can write endings for stories they are reading, engage in cloze activities, or play games that require them to answer questions concerning the plot of a story. By incorporating literature into the remedial curriculum and focusing on books which include topics of interest to students, the teacher can enhance the students' sense of control over the reading situation. (A sample reading interest inventory is included.) (MM)

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Utilizing Literature to Motivate Remedial Readers

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Author Notes

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Abstract

The incorporation of literature into the school curriculum is perceived as an important way to involve students in "real world" reading. In order to maximize the use of literature in the school curriculum, teachers need to concentrate on three areas: a) modeling for students; b) developing a sense of story; and c) enhancing comprehension skills through the use of literature. Literature should be viewed as an integral part of the school curriculum, not as a separate add-on.

UTILIZING LITERATURE TO MOTIVATE REMEDIAL READERS

Literature can be utilized very effectively in working with remedial readers to develop their vocabulary and comprehension skills. Unfortunately, all too often we find ourselves involving remedial students in published exercises which are designed to enhance skill development and which may or may not have carry over to the "real world" of reading. Three areas need to be addressed when working with remedial readers: 1) the concept of "reading" is usually underdeveloped with remedial students; 2) many remedial students have lowered self-concepts; and 3) many remedial readers do not have a wide range of reading interests. Each area will be considered in turn. First, many remedial readers have not developed the concept of "reading". In other words, reading is only seen as a series of exercises which are unrelated to what others may perceive as "reading", as in making the association of reading to that of a pleasurable experience;

Second, the self-concept of many remedial readers falls into what can be labeled as "low self-concept, low-achievement". In terms of attribution theory, these students ascribe success and failure to influences outside of their control. Failure is attributed to the difficulty level of the task whereas success is attributed to luck, not effort (Covington and Beery, 1976).

Third, many remedial readers do not like to engage in reading that comes under the heading of fantasy, poetry, or some types of traditional literature. They prefer to read about the real world, about how things work, about anything that they can relate to their present areas of interest. It should not be presumed that they have

no imaginations; simply that they have yet to be turned on to the world of fantasy that can be found in reading books, as well as to other genres of literature.

When considering the above areas, it is easy to see that when working with remedial readers, negative attitudes toward reading may be turned around simply by adjusting the curriculum which is presented to them and taking into account the psychological needs of the students. In order to do this, remedial reading teachers can take the first step by simply administering an interest inventory to the students with whom they will be working. There are several inventories that have already been developed. The inventory presented in Table 1 is one that has been developed specifically for use with remedial reading students. By using an inventory such as this, a message is sent to the student that conveys that their interests are important and that you as the teacher are trying to ensure their interests will be taken into account when you are planning the curriculum. In observing remedial students over the last fifteen years, the author has seen a tremendous turn around in the attitudes of remedial readers who were interested in such topics as horses (with the goal of becoming a veterinarian), sports (many remedial students are interested in playing sports or have favorite sports heroes), and railroads (one student was exceptionally knowledgeable about railroads but had read little on the subject). In terms of attribution theory, by taking into account the interests of the remedial student, the teacher is giving control to the students over the types of reading experiences they will be engaged in completing. This is a very important first step in assisting these learners in taking responsibility for their own learning.

SURVEY OF INTERESTS FOR READERS (or SIR)*

Name _____ Date _____

School _____ Teacher _____

Grade _____ Sex _____

Age _____ Reading Teacher _____

Directions: Answer each item which follows. You may ask an adult to help you read the survey or write your answers for you.

1. Name your two favorite television programs: _____

   _____

2. Name two of your favorite television characters: _____

   _____

3. Name your favorite sports activity: _____

   _____. Do you play this sport? _____

4. Name two of your favorite sports characters: _____

   _____

5. Name what you like to do the most indoors: _____

   _____

6. Name what you like to do the most outdoors: _____

   _____

7. Do you have a hobby? _____ What is it? _____

   If your answer was "no", what kind of a hobby would you like to do? _____

8. Name one story you like to read or listen to: _____

   What was the story about? _____

   _____

9. Name one story you thought was boring or uninteresting: _____

   _____. What was the story about? _____

   _____

10. If you could have one wish, what would it be: _____

_____. Why is this important? _____

_____

11. What do you want to do when you finish high school: _____

_____. Why do you want to do this? _____

_____

12. Name one book that you would like to read this year: _____

_____. Why do you want to read this book? ____

_____

Table 1.

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With the administration of the interest inventory, the teacher should then categorize the students' responses and compile a list of books that could be used in the classroom to accommodate the interests of the students. Resources such as Children's Literature (Huck, 1979) are wonderful in that they list literally thousands of books that can be accessed for these students. Once a list is compiled, the assistance of the school media specialists or public librarians should be requested in order to access the books. Many librarians are more than willing to provide assistance to teachers for such projects.

It is important to keep in mind that the reading materials students indicate interest in will not necessarily match the interests of the remedial reading teacher, who is after all a mature reader with a wide range of reading tastes. While the teacher may know that a particular book is simply wonderful and should be read by all of the

students, the students do not yet acknowledge that reading is a pleasurable experience that they should want to engage in pursuing. Therefore a caveat is in order: slowly introduce remedial students to the pleasures of reading fantasy by taking ten minutes a day to read to them from one of the teacher's favorite books. By doing this, the remedial teacher is providing modeling for the students and is letting them experience the pleasure of listening to a good book. After engaging in this practice, a gradual interest in books other than that of the informational genre will start to emerge. This is an important step in developing reading tastes for remedial readers.

When utilizing literature with remedial students, one should think that each book can be utilized to develop vocabulary skills as well as to enhance comprehension skills. One idea is simple to have a bulletin board set aside for new/unusual vocabulary words that are encountered in students' books. Students can then illustrate the meanings of these new words, or matching games can be played with the meanings of several words supplied that students have to match correctly. By having students involved in finding their won words for these activities, the teacher is encouraging students to take charge of their own learning.

For comprehension, students can write endings for their stories they are reading, engage in Cloze procedure activities, or play games that require them to answer questions concerning the plot of a story, main characters, what would happen if, etc. Students enjoy putting together their own questions which could them be utilized in a learning center for other readers of the same books. These are just a few of the many ideas which can be developed to maximally utilize

literature in the classroom. The author has personally found in remedial situations that the level of motivation for the students increases tremendously when students are involved in real world reading activities (yes, the author used to buy all the kits, too!).

To sum, teachers of remedial readers are in a unique position to influence their students positively in their reading habits and to promote their reading interests. By incorporating literature into the remedial curriculum and focusing on books which include topics of interest to the students, the teacher can also do much to enhance the students' sense of control over the reading situation. This in turn enhances the students' self-image as readers who are actively involved in the process, not just passive individuals. Literature can therefore provide support to the overall goals of the reading program, which include advancing students' self-esteem and producing readers who will "take charge" of their reading lives.

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